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## Germ Patrol: The Shopping Mall



Here are some of the dirtiest spots – and how to handle them:

**ATM.** Unfortunately, cash may not be all you pick up here. Researchers found germs on every button tested on ATM keypads. *Hint: Use knuckles instead of fingertips to tap keys. And*

Heading to the mall to check out the latest spring fashions? You may want to bring along some hand cleaner!

Turns out malls are full of more than just cool clothes and gadgets. They're also loaded with germs!

*wash or sanitize hands when done.*

**Escalator.** Researchers found traces of sweat, waste matter and blood on 20 percent of escalator rails tested. *Hint: Avoid touching. If you must to be safe, clean hands afterward.*

**Restroom.** Researchers report restroom soap dispensers – of all things – are mega germ magnets. One in four tested contained waste and other germs. *Hint: Scrub hands thoroughly with hot water for 15 to 20 seconds after lathering up.*

**Fitting room.** Research found people often leave germs on clothes they try. *Hint: Always wear underwear. And cover cuts before trying on stuff.*

**Makeup counter.** One study found 67 percent to 100 percent of makeup counter testers contained bacteria. *Hint: Don't apply. Buy and try makeup. And return if you don't like it.*



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## Smart Living with Asthma

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## Sun Safety: Lighten Up

It's time for a refresher course on sun safety.

Let's start with how the sun actually burns your skin. Its ultraviolet (UV) light cuts through skin layers, and kills cells beneath that normally make new skin. When that happens, blood flow increases to the burned areas, turning skin red and warm.

But a little burn never hurt anyone, right? *Wrong!* Experts say UV rays can change cells. And cause cancer and early wrinkling.

Over a million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed in the U.S. each year. About 70,000 are melanoma, the deadliest kind. Melanoma is very dangerous, because it can spread to other organs.

The good news is skin cancer can be prevented and treated if found early. The No. 1 way to reduce risk is to limit UV exposure.

Other tips: Wear an SPF 30 (or higher) broad-spectrum (UVA and UVB) sunscreen daily. Cover up (long-sleeves, sunglasses, wide-brim

hat) in the sun. And don't use tanning beds!

**Reality check.** *Tanning beds are not safe.* Research shows regular use triples – and in some cases even *quadruples* – melanoma risk.

Melanoma is one of the fastest-growing cancers among whites. The number of cases jumped about 2 percent each year between 1997 and 2006. During the same period, indoor tanning skyrocketed.

The World Health Organization recently raised tanning beds to its highest cancer risk category, citing research showing:

- One burn in a tanning bed equals 10 to 12 sunburns.
- Use of tanning beds before age 30 ups melanoma risk by 75 percent.

Remember that next time you think about ducking into a tanning salon.

*Still crave that sun-kissed look? Try a sunless tanning spray or lotion!*

# Extra Weight Ups Asthma Risk

Need another reason to keep pounds in check? Add this to the list: a new study found excess weight ups asthma risk.

Researchers at Kaiser Permanente Southern California studied 681,000 children and teens, ages 6 to 19. They wanted to see how obesity affects health.

Their findings, published online in the journal *Obesity*: chubby kids were more likely than their healthy-weight



friends to have asthma.

Being overweight or obese also seemed to make asthma worse.

According to the study, overweight kids with asthma visited their doctor

or an emergency room more often than healthy-weight asthmatics. They also used more inhaled and oral corticosteroid asthma meds.

Previous research has also shown a link between asthma and obesity. One five-year study of 88,304 women found that obesity nearly *doubled their chances* of getting asthma.

Your best bet: Eat right. Exercise. Get plenty of sleep. And slim down.

Need help shaving pounds? Here are some tips from the Weight-Control Information Network:

- Keep a food diary to track how much you eat.
- Serve smaller portions at home.
- At restaurants, eat only half your meal and take the rest home.
- Don't eat watching TV.
- Add moderate to vigorous physical activity to your weight-loss plan. Start by walking 10 minutes a day, three days a week. Build up slowly to at least 30 minutes daily, five days a week.

*As always, check with your doctor before starting any fitness program.*

# Is it Allergies or Asthma?

Can you tell the difference between asthma and allergy symptoms?

If not, you may be putting your health at risk.

The Allergy and Asthma Network (AAN) estimates 80 percent of people are “very confused” about allergy and asthma symptoms. As a result, about 5,000 Americans die of asthma every year, because they misdiagnose themselves at home. And take the wrong medicine.

Some medicines require a prescription. But you can get many allergy meds over-the-counter.

Those drugs are safe *if used as intended* – to relieve allergies. But they don't work for asthma. In fact, the AAN warns they can be *dangerous* for asthmatics.

The reason: they work by drying out the sinuses. And dry sinuses are a common trigger for severe asthma. In this condition,



airways become so narrow, it's hard to breathe without the help of an inhaler.

Have asthma? Follow your treatment plan. Not sure

if symptoms are caused by asthma or allergies? Call your doctor. He/she can pinpoint the cause – and tell you the best treatment.

*The bottom line: Don't take any medicine without checking with your doctor!*

# Avoid Scented Sprays and Candles

Do you like scented candles and sprays? How about those plug-in air fresheners? Beware.



They may smell like an ocean breeze. But they're not so sweet for people with allergies and asthma. In fact, they can be downright dangerous.

A study found a third of people with asthma are extremely

sensitive to chemicals. And more than a third reported irritation from scented products.

“The chemicals in some of these products can trigger nasal congestion, sneezing and a runny nose,” said Stanley Fineman, president of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. “With asthmatics, there's really good data showing their lung function changes when they're exposed to these compounds.”

So how can you make your house smell good without these fake fragrances?

Do what real estate agents do to make houses seem more inviting. *Bake chocolate chip cookies. Or put a pot of water with cinnamon sticks, cloves and cider on the stove.*

# Gyms: Asthma Triggers?

Heading to the gym for a workout? Great. But be prepared.

Most gyms are loaded with asthma and allergy triggers, according to the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI). Among them:

- **Cleaning products.** Gyms use some pretty powerful stuff to scrub equipment. Many cleaning products contain a cocktail of chemicals that can cause a runny nose, watery eyes, and a throbbing headache. They may also trigger or worsen asthma symptoms.
- **Workout mats.** Allergy triggers also hide in workout mats. That's because most gyms wipe down the mats with the same strong cleaners they use on the equipment. Plus, many mats are covered with latex rubber – a known allergen for nearly 3 million Americans.
- **The pool.** Does your workout include swimming? You can't beat a water workout. It's great for muscles. And easy on the joints. But know this: pools at most gyms are loaded with germ-killing chlorine. Chlorine can be dangerous if you have asthma, because it can make it hard to breathe.



- **Mold.** Anyone who goes to the gym is well acquainted with the other big trigger there – mold. So don't linger in locker rooms or bathrooms, where mold may be lurking in the showers – and just about every place else!
- **Exercise.** Exercise triggers asthma in some people. Using a pre-treatment medicine 10 to 15 minutes before a workout may keep symptoms in check.

FYI: This doesn't mean you shouldn't work out! On the contrary: most people – including those with asthma – should exercise at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

*Just be careful. And get your doctor's OK!*